FELLOWSHIP IN
PRAYER

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Cover photograph by Tom Dunham

Editor's Introduction 2

Insights 5

Fidelity to Daily Duty *by Adrian van Kaam* 6

The Absence of God *by Wayne Teasdale* 11

Spirituality and Everyday Life: What's in a Prayer is Strength *by Lori Carlson* 16

Human Experience and Spiritual Growth (in the *Notebooks of Paul Brunton*) *by Paul Cash* 19

New Poetry *by William de Bolt* 24

For Meditation: A Rabbi's Approach to Conflict *by Ira Progoff* 26

Listening for Prayer *by Alice G. Torres* 32

"A Transforming Experience": Love Always Wins *by Charlotte Carpenter* 36

Books We Have Enjoyed 38

"Read and Meditate; Pray and Contemplate"

Eight hundred years ago in France, when the renowned "holy man" Guigo II was asked how to pray, he answered: "Reading, you should seek; meditating, you will find; praying, you shall call; and contemplating, the door will be opened to you." This four-part formula, the core of Guigo's great treatise on prayer, is as relevant in our Age of Information as it was in his Age of Faith.

The first step on Guigo's ladder of the spiritual life refers to *lectio divina*, reading about "divine things" in scriptures or other uplifting books. The reading begins with the simple, humble longing of the heart for God, for things invisible which time cannot destroy, and concludes with a sense of fullness, as though one had ingested a holy meal. Transposed into the atmosphere of eternity, nourished and energized for the higher life of the spirit, the reader feels the inner religious sense awaken and knows that God is near. It is like the medieval desert wanderer who drinks from a spring of cool water on a dusty summer day: one leaves refreshed and revivified.

In the *meditation* step, one reflects on the selected reading point by point, pausing to dwell on the deep meaning of the words, looking between the lines, as it were, for new truths, for better ways to live and think and express the endless feelings that flood our souls. In the course of reflection, images come into consciousness of faces, places, and situations needing attention; one senses a need to do things differently, to be careful about the next meeting, letter, visit, purchase, sentence spoken or written. One experiences, also, the genuine self and feels a gentle obligation to renounce all deluded or exaggerated self-images for clear knowledge of the most dignified aspects of the self. The personal shadow may also appear with traits to correct. An expanded spiritual identity brings with it new awareness of living in a context where God wills all events, down to the smallest sparrow's fall from the springtime nest. For self-knowledge is the truest way to knowledge of God. Thomas Merton calls this outcome of meditation "finding our heart," discovering in unmasked personality the principle of eternal life.

Praying in Guigo's paradigm refers to the yearning, aching words that reach out across the darknesses of space and time, from every part of the

earth and in every century, to the Absolute: with cries of faith and sadness, hope and sorrow, love and despair. In this phase of the ascent to God, praying is "calling," and calling falls into five basic forms: "thanksgiving," the fundamental mood of prayer; "petition," a request made of God; "repentance," contrition for omissions and commissions; "intercession," our prayer for others; and "praise," the doxology hard to elicit in those with unmet needs. Neither rules nor repetitions should govern this stage of the religious way, nothing routine should stifle the spontaneous heart raised up to God.

In *contemplation*, the mind rests and ceases to control, so that, passively watchful and mindful, one can relate to reality in a new way and see life lit by another light. Guigo believed that in this stage, a special door opens, a door through which one enters the deepest ground of existence, what Ruysbroeck called "the world that is unwalled." Here the strange or beautiful faces we always painted on God are voided. Without the comfort of old ideas, we touch directly the real Divinity unrepresented in the form of pure being—plain and bare nothingness—stark emptiness. From this mystical breakthrough, we gain a vision of the Infinite World till now hidden behind the phenomenal world. It is as though one's private, personal landscape were suddenly brought into harmony with the whole garden of creation, where all men and women stand united in the universal greenness of the earth, unblighted by fences, dying forests, and obstacles to love.

To follow Guigo's way of prayer, you could read a scriptural passage on loving the world's "undesirables," then meditate on the words in relation to your attitudes: can I, like Mother Teresa, see God in "the distressing disguise of the poor," or do I look the other way? In the praying stage, ask for more compassion, then in contemplation let go of the issue entirely and rest silently in God. You will sense your compassion grow. You will feel a oneness with everyone.

The steps need not follow one another in an invariant sequence. You can break into the pattern at any point, skip a stage or dwell on one for weeks or months, or return to a level you practiced long ago. John of the Cross wrote that disinterest or boredom will signal the need to move to another level; Teresa of Avila added that in the life of prayer, one goes either forward or backward: prayer counts, not how one prays.

The articles in this edition of "Fellowship In Prayer" are by and for women and men like you, who "read and meditate, pray and contemplate." You have written me that you want training in spiritual concen-

tration, purification from material wants, freedom from the fog of half-consciousness for the sake of full lucidity. As you read our October issue, may you find the blind desire besetting this search grow content, at peace, at least fleetingly fulfilled.

Please let me know if this issue meets your needs.

Mary Ford-Grabowsky
Editor

Master Rinzai was fond of asking, "What, at this moment, is lacking?"

Let it be enough to know ourselves to be in the place where God wants us, and carry on our work, even though it be no more than the work of an ant, infinitesimally small, with unforeseeable results. Now is the hour of the garden in the night, the hour of the silent offering; the hour of hope: God alone, faceless, unknown, yet undeniably God.
Abbe Monchanin

Take one step out of yourself, and you will arrive at God.
Sufi saying

Surely in each human being there is both a hungry outcast and a Sister of Charity, desolate without those whom she can feed, clothe, and shelter.
Rebecca West

Absolute attention is prayer.
Simone Weil

Prayer is to religion what original research is to science.
P. T. Forsythe

God is at home; we are abroad.
Meister Eckhart

If a pane of glass could understand the light that fills it and into which it disappears, it would be exactly like the soul of the contemplative who wakes up to the reality of God, to the touch of . . . understanding. For the contemplative understands God by the experience of being saturated in the Light, which is . . . Truth itself poured directly into the soul.
Thomas Merton

Your sufferings have never brought you wisdom.
Euripides

I saw that where God appears, peace comes, and anger has no place.
Julian of Norwich

Do not aim at achieving Buddhahood.
Master Dogen

Fidelity to Daily Duty

ADRIAN VAN KAAM, C.S.SP.

Here is a prolonged and tender prayer for faithfulness. Dialoguing with the Source of his life, the author asks for daily strength to love and serve.

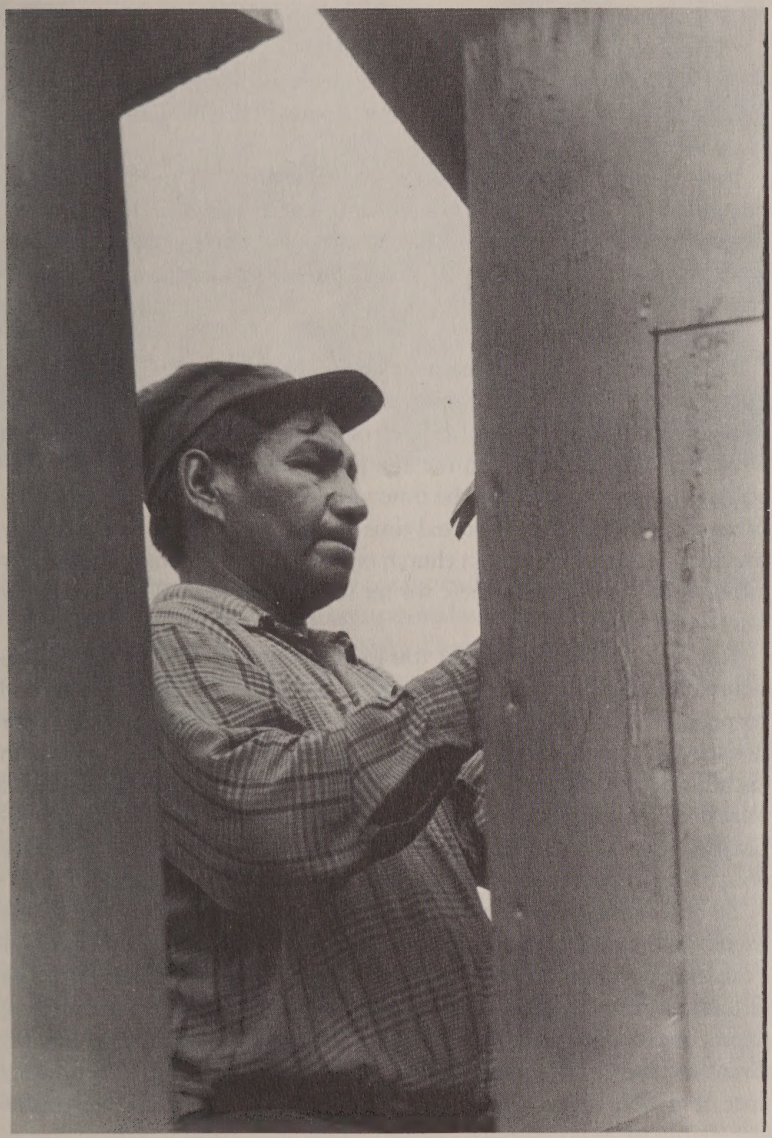
Some days ago, I talked with a young man. He was employed by an airline maintenance crew. He told me of the fines an airline had to pay because its mechanics had been negligent. The lives of the passengers had been endangered. He said to me, "The sky will only be safe when we love our job, give it our all, care for the passengers as fellow humans whose precious lives rest in our hands. If you take a job like this, you must feel responsible, be faithful to your duties, no matter your mood and worries." He felt that such concern had diminished not only among maintenance crews, but in many occupations and, worst of all, in family life. "The quality of life is going down," he said. "People tend to be moody and mercurial; they do not live up to their responsibilities in a consistent concern one can count on."

People may work for money, prestige, or promotion—all legitimate concerns—but they should be complemented by a sense of commitment. We should not look for an easy deal, for cutting corners. Otherwise, people can no longer count on us. Trust disappears and without trust life becomes unlivable. Where there is no care, there is no trust. When profit prevails, kindness dies. When commitment is absent, neglect is present. If dedication starves, life loses its sparkle.

The wisdom of the mechanic makes us aware of the need for fidelity in a world grown less trustworthy. Fidelity to ideals and promises, to spouses and children, to friends, neighbors, church, school, job, union, political party, is essential for fully human living.

Fidelity goes deeper than just doing things efficiently like a computer. Fidelity means that one's heart is in the doing. One is really with it. We feel for what has to be done, for the people who depend on us and for the God who trusts in us. Fidelity makes us do things as well as we can with-

Adrian van Kaam has won worldwide respect as the founder of Formative Spirituality. Among his most popular books are The Transcendent Self, In Search of Spiritual Identity, *and* Spirituality and the Gentle Life. *He is currently working on a five-volume series on the science of spiritual formation.*



Paul M. Schrock

out overconcern. Overconcern conflicts with effectiveness. If we do our best, the Lord does the rest.

Relaxed fidelity is rooted in faith. Fidelity is called faith-fulness. The fuller our faith, the greater our fidelity. Because faith has faltered, fidelity has weakened.

Jesus is one of those who asks us to be faithful: "Who is the faithful, farsighted servant whom the master has put in charge of his household to dispense food at need? Happy that servant whom his master discovers at work on his return! I assure you, he will put him in charge of all his property" (Mt. 24:44-46).

In response we say:

Thank you for your appreciation of my fidelity. At any time you may knock gently at the door of my heart. Make me ready to let you in, to sense the sound of your love, the step of your approaching feet. Make me welcome you. You may visit me at a time I least expect; the time of involvement in my daily task, the time of fidelity or infidelity in my family or on my job. The least expected time! I should not think that you only touch my heart when I am in church or say prayers. You may choose any moment of my day to be there for me in a special way. Who knows the time or the hour?

This world is the household you love. You made me a servant in this house. You assigned a special charge in one of its countless rooms and corners. If I am faithful to my charge, no matter how modest, your household as a whole will benefit. So will my fellow servants. If I lack in faithfulness the quality of life in your household will be less than it could have been. Lacking fidelity, I am no longer a channel of your love for people. You may come unexpectedly. Hopefully, you find me ready to receive you, living in fidelity to my small charge in the house of God.

To be faithful is to beautify your creation. To serve you is to serve your friends in the little corner of your home entrusted to me. You make clear I can only be faithful if I am a farsighted servant. How difficult it is to be faithful, if I keep my nose to the grindstone, if I only see the tediousness, depreciation, disappointment that accompany every human endeavor. Grant me the gift of farsightedness, of seeing beyond the outer appearance of my job, my family, neighborhood, school, and parish. Nearsight-

Paul M. Schrock

edness can only discourage me. It paralyzes fidelity. Myopic people cannot be faithful to tasks that are often thankless and irritating.

Fidelity is the art of seeing beyond, of hearing a divine voice in everydayness, of sensing the mystery of a household unfolding over the millennia in universe and humanity.

Let me be faithful to the hidden magnificence of your home, even if it seems at times to crumble in my myopic sight. Make me see with the farsighted eyes of faith the sweet reflection of your splendor in the tasks that bind my days together. Let me share in your fidelity to the daily round in Nazareth. I shall be able to do what you ask me to: to dispense with loving care the particular kind of food I am called to give to those in need. It may be the food of airplane maintenance for those in need of safety, of carefully cleaning for those in need of sanitary washrooms, of wisdom for those in need of counsel, of justice for those in need of relief of oppression, of education for those in need of learning, of dance, music, painting, sculpture, poetry for those in need of beauty. Such kinds of poverty will always be with us as you predicted.

The only thing that counts is: Do you find me faithful to my calling when you invite me to intimacy with you at a time when I least expect you? When you encounter me in the open monastery of daily pains and duties: You say that you will put me in charge of all your property. At the moment of your visitation you gently stroke my tired soul, you refresh my worn-out mind, you calm my anxious heart. You fill me with new vision of your presence in my endeavors. You make me see how my little charges share in your everlasting care.

I share with you intimately the care for the household of humanity. God entrusted this household to you in me and to me in you. In you, with my fellow servants, I am in charge of all your property. You whisper to me: we are in it together, my friend. You tell me that fidelity to my daily duty is my way of sharing with you the unfolding mystery of God's tender love for humanity.

The Absence of God

WAYNE TEASDALE

People encounter the apparent absence of God not only in moments of misunderstanding, helplessness, addiction, and extinguished hopes, the author writes, but especially in the experience of loneliness. Yet even in the most intense suffering, it is possible to break through the absence into the presence of God.

The French existentialist Sartre popularized the contemporary world's preoccupation with nothingness which is a philosophical way to speak about the problem of the apparent absence of God. I say "apparent" because God is never really absent, except of course in a person's decision to sin. Certainly humankind itself lives with the consequences of its sinfulness, daily brought home to us in war, injustice, oppression, violence, terrorism, and other blatant forms of evil. God seems absent in all of these horrible and depressing situations.

Each person experiences this apparent absence of God in numerous ways; these are the various kinds of suffering that people encounter in life: misunderstanding, helplessness, addictions, frustrations, extinguished hopes, persistent fears, and the dreaded cliff where abysmal despair lurks beyond.

Perhaps for every one of us, however, the most common, indeed concrete form of God's "absence," His seeming withdrawal from us, is in the painful experience of loneliness. It is a terrible thing to be alone when you want to be with others, especially when you need some human companionship; this is a great trial. It is the frequent problem of so many of the elderly of our society. I think it is true to say that in the loneliness moments we go through an experience of what is similar to absence. And yet, when we learn to accept our loneliness—preferably as young as possible—we begin to penetrate its ontological truth, the mystery it both hides and reveals, the very Presence of God behind the veil of this experience. When we begin to understand loneliness for what it really is, that is, as an opportunity for God and ourselves to meet in the seeming darkness of faith, then our loneliness is transformed into solitude. This is its

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Tom Dunham

real value, a condition for developing a deeper awareness of God's Presence.

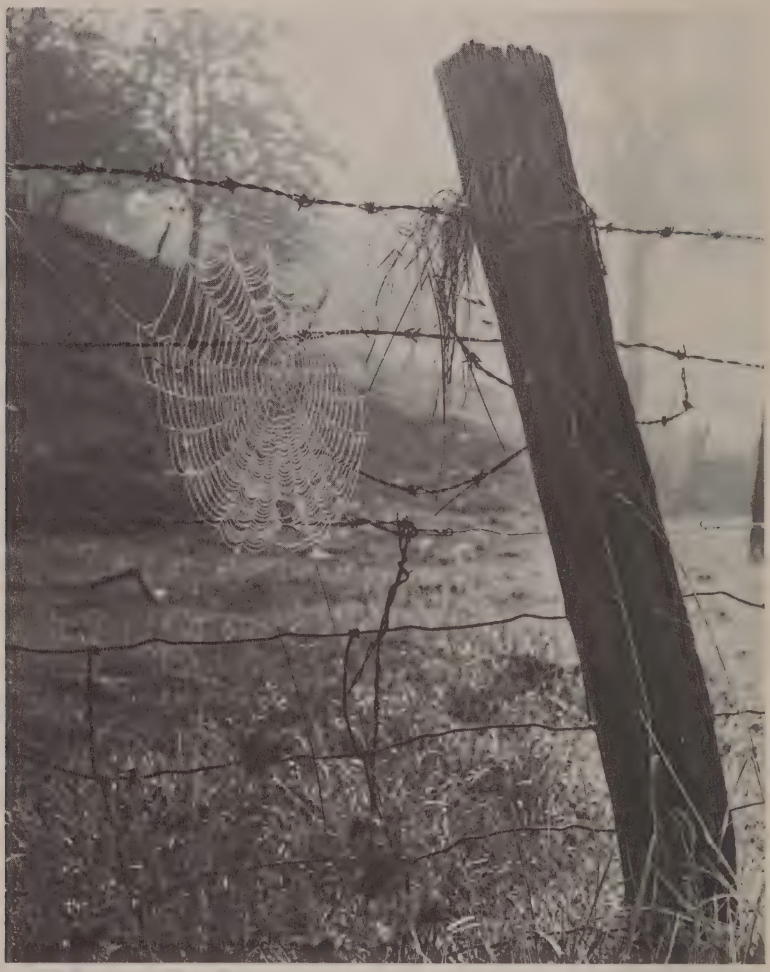
Now when we look at the world around us and the secular culture which is predicated on the assumption of God's "absence," or rather on a false autonomy from God, we start to realize that even here God's absence is more apparent than real. The secular culture—addicted to the illusion of its own sovereignty—props up the environment of the "absence" of the Divine Reality; it feeds the sense of this absence by its own implication—meaninglessness. Everything seems meaningless when reality is distorted, and so as this distortion occurs, a sense of nothingness and contingency prevail, both of which breed the attitude of helplessness and despair that are the results of the experience of God's "absence" when viewed culturally. But when the same secular life is approached through the eyes of an enlightened faith, there is a penetration beyond the appearances, and God's grounding Presence becomes clear. This is true even in the most obviously unreligious of situations.

Suffering itself can also appear to support the fear of the Divine's withdrawal from the domain of the human, and is an element of life that is interpreted by this civilization as an unmitigated evil, something to be avoided. The same is true of death. Death is considered a very bad thing, rather than what it really is: the entrance into the beatific life of the kingdom of Heaven. Suffering and death are regarded as tragedies, and so also of further occasions of the ordeal of nothingness, despair and the "absence" of God. But this is because our society has actually reversed the truth by its perverse system of values. For suffering and death are genuinely redemptive; they are not unspeakable evils. It is because the sense of reality is significantly blurred, obscured, and so not understood, that God seems absent from so many areas of human life. The truth is, God is never really very far from us. He dwells in all things, especially in the depths of the soul, in the "cave of the heart" where we are united with Him in grace.

How then are we to break through the sense of God's absence and reach the utter glory of His intense Presence? I think, perhaps, by first recognizing the positive value of suffering, and ultimately of death itself. Suffering is related to the Paschal Mystery, and is our participation in it. But more, suffering, especially that profound interior kind of the dark nights of sense and Spirit, is the way to spiritual transformation.

This process of spiritual transformation has union with the triune God as its constant goal. Suffering, darkness and the experience of God's apparent absence are essential moments in this journey into the deifying life of union with God. Such a union is one of consciousness, but also and more essentially, of wills: the human with the Divine. The dark nights—the "absence" of God—aim at purification of the human will in the Divine will. It is a process that frees us from self-interest, self-will or the false self of pride that seeks only itself.

Self-interest, ego, the false self or pride—they are all the same thing—are what keep God at a distance from us. It is often because the false self is so strong that God withdraws the experience of His Presence. It is essential to grasp that pride, the pursuit of the false self is the root cause of man's alienation from God. Pride makes a statement over and against the Divine Reality. Psychologically, pride is the attempt to usurp God's place. It is pride which has to go if the person is to grow into true Christian maturity. The dark nights—especially the second one—has the pur-



Paul M. Schrock

pose of disengaging the human will from the egoic structure that supports a false autonomy. And it is this autonomy that undergirds the false self and its many projects for happiness.

The experience of God's "absence," and the painful awareness of our own sinfulness that arises in the second night, encourage the growth of the person in the spiritual life. Healing and integration occur in this intense period of suffering. Through this darkness faith perceives the Divine radiance of God's unutterably glorious and unifying Presence. Each of us has only to plunge into the embrace of this ever inviting Presence at the heart of all that is, and in true hope, surrender ourselves to God Who is there for us. God, Who is pure Love itself, slowly leads us out of the slavery of sin through His Son, but we must pass through the pain and loneliness of the cross, the seeming absence of what we know in faith is actually total Presence, in order to be united with the Source of all that is good, holy, beautiful, wise and true. For we experience the "absence" of God because we have all been absent to Him in our sinful times. In order to be one with God, we must be free of our own absence from Him, free of sin, and then we are not only images of God, but likenesses of His glory as well, the likeness revealed by the Father in Jesus Christ.

What's in a Prayer is Strength

LORI CARLSON

Prayer has helped the author of this powerful article to meet humiliating sexism with courage, to cope with the fear of living alone in a "bruised, forlorn neighborhood," and to face with hope the "envy and mean-spiritedness" that sometimes mark fast-track city life.

One day last year I left my supervisor's office with a splitting headache, and a feisty prayer. We had talked about my salary, and I felt miserable, needing very much a raise I wouldn't get.

Amid the feelings of amazement and frustration that rallied me during our half-hour chat—woman to woman—I imagined myself stronger than my boss. Spiritually stronger. And, so, I started to pray while she sat easy, telling me that, aw, I shouldn't feel so bad; she had a friend whose daughter was my age, twenty-eight, an architect no less, and made just $18,000. A prayer steely strong I prayed, into her baby blues that instant.

Prayer. No one talks about it in the city, among professionals especially. It reeks of scent. A buttery cloud of dears and mys.

Today, when everyone is tough, or at least trying to be, forceful thought is needed to survive. But prayer *is* thought, bolstered by desire: an effective way to cope with aggravation, strife. This simple word in my vocabulary "prayer" is a disarming power. It challenges: envy, mean-spiritedness, dishonesty.

Often I sit in my office on the top floor of a mansion on a swanky avenue, and muse: Why am I here? Here happens to be an obscure, small space that virtually no one in my building sees. Not a bad description for me, actually. I'm rather small of stature, slight; and in a place that values business and plays politics, I am considered an obscure type—an editor of Latin American fiction.

No one knows me, I'm prone to lament, really knows the person I am

Lori Carlson, Managing Editor of "Review of Latin American Literature and Arts" in New York City, has a Master's degree in Hispanic Studies and translates into English the work of Latin American women writers. She also finds time to direct the Literature Department at the Americas Society and loves to attend Riverside Church.

Barry L. Jacob

because my physical appearance has the annoying effect of deafening ears and enlarging eyes until all that's me is pretty. A discomfiting condition, when one is working in a city that exacts the most of sinew, spirit and the best years of one's life—just to be a resident.

For women in the work world, prayer could be an answer to discrimi-

nation. Prayer is silent power. And it unifies. It is invisible—can't be destroyed—yet discernible as it yields success. Perhaps the essence of prayer is self-birth, the best of self.

Once in graduate school, I met a scholar who was an intellectual without an ounce of mercy, simply having no tolerance for my kind of knowledge. Oh, we battled in class until with one grand sweep of satisfaction he would send me out the door, my head bowed low. Each day. Then one autumn afternoon, I was invited to his office for a conference. I was, he winced, the only student in his seminar to deserve an A on a term paper. I had written about a Mexican poet, a religious man, whom my professor easily derided. But it was my argument, the clarity of thought with which I presented my thesis, that he was forced to appreciate. I was a writer, he conceded. Writing or praying were then, and now, the same for me.

Religion, really, has no special claim to prayer. Prayer is greater than a system. It is the whole of humanness given to complete imagination.

At my desk, I have prayed, frowning at dusk's winter—knowing that no one would be waiting for me in my tiny home, set in a bruised and forlorn neighborhood. In such a moment, prayer has conquered fear.

It has also been the only active position I could take facing desperation. Because I know that making money—thus living on a safe block, eating well, going to the doctor when necessary—is generally harder for me and other women than it is for men.

Prayer has been a ready weapon for humiliation, too. A few years ago, during one of my most vulnerable periods, I was told I might need breast surgery. Lying naked on a hospital examination table for the initial diagnosis, I was asked by my physician where I'd gone to college. When I responded in the same familiar vein, with the name of a Big Ten University, he hummed: not quite Harvard, is it. A second later, his needle pierced my breast. I braved a prayer. In pain, in total loneliness.

Prayer lets loose a fettered heart when the world is pretty loveless. And small love there is where greed and ignorance command.

I've struck greed with prayer on many nights when there was just a crafted hope for me to hold. When my reality was work, lots of it, no money for my efforts, no encouragement, I've knelt. My hands cupped on a single bed in one small studio—I closed my eyes and offered my best love to dense black air that might contain a God, might not.

Praising the might of me.

Human Experience and Spiritual Growth (in the *Notebooks of Paul Brunton*)

PAUL CASH

Here the devoted student of a mystical philosopher explains the teacher's understanding of the complex purposes of suffering and gives advice for the development of a noble character. Brunton's outlook "includes Eastern and Western ideas," the author writes, "yet transcends both."

> The same God who gives you the inner peace of profound meditation gives you also the storm of outer tribulation. Why?
>
> *Paul Brunton*

Throughout his long career of spiritual service, philosopher Paul Brunton (1898-1981) stressed that every experience has meaning and is related to a universal purpose. He considered it "a paradox of the strongest irony that the place where we can best find the Overself (the individual link with God) is not in another world, but in this one, that the chance to grow enduringly out of darkness into light is better here."

Asked once how his own teaching differed from others he was aware of, he answered: "Most mystics, when they first realize that they really are the soul, much more than the body, react by trying to find some way to escape the body once and for all. Some of them," he smiled with wry amusement, "even go on for many, many lifetimes, concocting all sorts of elaborate techniques, using the will in every conceivable way, trying to bring this about. But sooner or later they realize that they just can't do it . . . and finally they are forced to ask: What does it mean to have a body and to be in the world? This is where the philosophical level of spiritual life begins." And it's in the way that this question is answered that P.B.'s teaching differs from others.

Through the early books he wrote from 1934-1952, Paul Brunton first became known to millions of readers in the West as a powerfully convincing advocate of what the West needed to learn from Oriental mystical

Paul Cash is an editor at Larson Publications in Burdett, New York. He received training and inspiration from Paul Brunton during the last six months of Brunton's life and was designated with one other person to edit Brunton's notebooks (available at Larson Publications, 4936 Route 414, Burdett, New York 14818).

Tom Dunham

techniques and philosophies. Yet, even in those early books, he was clearly not recommending a wholesale importation of Eastern religion to displace devitalized Western teachings. Though he had great respect for the religious devotion, intellectual capacity, mystical development, and ascetic hardihood he encountered on his extensive travels through the East, he came ultimately to the conviction that none of these possesses a value anything like that of noble character. In one of the late writings

Paul M. Schrock

published from his personal notebooks, he declares, "I no longer admire a man because he has spent twenty years in the practice of yoga or the study of metaphysics; I admire him because he has brought compassion, tolerance, rectitude, and dependability into his conduct."

The comprehensiveness of his approach to full human spiritual development matured into an outlook that includes Eastern and Western ideas yet transcends both in its universality and relevance to modern spiritual practitioners. Unlike the secular humanist, he does not extol the virtues of human character as a suitable *substitute* for consciously acknowledging the omnipresence of a greater God and seeking ecstatic mystical union with it. Unlike the majority of mystics, he does not return to us from his ecstatic raptures to declare that normal human experience is a worthless and useless illusion. And unlike many naive would-be mystics, he does not try to make either this world or our experience of it more lovely than God ever intended:

> In youth we suffer from an unreflecting optimism or an unknowledgeable pessimism but the years correct that. After we have gone through enough experience, we know better how to be cheerful without permitting our optimism to obstruct our reasoning faculties and without permitting our pessimism to dominate during reaction to difficulties. We know we cannot afford the shallow optimism which thrusts the thorn aside and sees only the rose. We prefer to view the red beauty in all its brutality while enjoying the fragrance.

According to Paul Brunton, "We suffer primarily because we have isolated our conscious being from the universal being. Only when we renounce this isolation shall we be able to remove our suffering." He tells us that "pain and suffering belong to the worlds of limited being. If man has to endure them, it is because they serve to remind him of this, to warn him against self-deception and to arouse him to take the homeward path." But unlike many religious treatises that would simply have us bear such suffering as an act of patience and faith in a salvation in some hypothetical "Elsewhere," he points to a more complex purpose in it *right here*: "It is as if the higher law provides penalties for ignorance of it; as if the higher power, having given man intelligence and intuition, bids him find out the spiritual facts of the situation or take the consequences."

If we look deeper into the apparent callousness of this last statement, we find a key to forming a perspective on human experience that combines the best points of both the mystical and the humanistic views. This

key is that the higher power, God, has given us intelligence and intuition just as it has given us life and being and numerous other potential powers. "If I am asked why we can find no trace of God's presence in ourselves," we read in one of the notebooks, "I answer that we are full of evidence, not merely traces. God is present in us as consciousness, the state of being aware; as thought, the capacity to think; as activity, the power to move; and as stillness, the condition of ego, emotion, intellect, and body which finally reveals what these other things simply point to." In another section we find, "If we can bring ourselves to look upon events when they flow upon us as being intended to elicit our qualities and exercise our powers, we will learn to acknowledge and thus accept the responsibility of choosing whether those qualities be positive or negative, whether those powers be good or bad." Insofar as the qualities we react with and the powers we exercise are positive, we actualize the god*like* within ourselves and our experience leads us into ever more intimate knowledge of, and conscious union with, the God who is the source of these powers and qualities, "for life itself is trying to develop that intelligence in us until it can make us aware of the highest meaning of all—the Soul." Insofar as the qualities we respond with are negative, we suffer and add to the suffering of those around us; we have chosen, albeit in most cases unconsciously, to isolate ourselves from the godlike within us. The presence of the suffering ultimately has a positive effect:

> Suffering has a purgative effect in the scheme of things. If in the earlier stages of our growth it tempts us to seek relief in evil courses, in the later stages it presses us to seek out its real cause and final cure. Next it has an educative place, for it leads us to analyze experience and learn to understand its lessons. Last it has a redemptive place, for it drives us to confess our weakness and seek mercy, grace, and help.

This point of view acknowledges *choice* in the core of human personality. The inner qualities we choose to align ourselves with and express in our reactions to what life presents us with, indicate what is needed for the next step in our spiritual growth. In this sense life tests us, not to give us a grade, but to show us ourselves and the consequences of the self we have chosen. Through the consequences we learn the wisdom or lack of wisdom in our past choices and revise our future ones on the basis of what we have learned. It is a process of forming our own character, and in so doing, contributing to our collective destiny—that is, to what life can offer humanity as a world to live in *today*.

Lesson

I am in a hurry,
  Like a thought,
And find out through worry
  God is not.

People

Changes prove only
  Men will be men,
And women stay women
  Liké days, or a pen.

William De Bolt is a minister in Trenton, Nebraska, who has published nineteen books of verse. He is Poet Laureate of his county and, in his spare time judges national poetry contests.

Paul M. Schrock

A Rabbi's Approach to Conflict

IRA PROGOFF

Here is a universal solution to the problem of interpersonal conflict. The Rabbi helps two families to overcome contentious ego-desires and self-assertion by placing their dispute in a larger context. As the families begin to see the deep spiritual meaning in their struggle, their stress is transformed into peace. The excerpt comes from Ira Progoff's latest book, The Dynamics of Hope, *reviewed in the next edition of "F.I.P."*

A story is told in the Hasidic tradition of Judaism about two families who had a dispute in eighteenth-century Poland. It seems that a member of one of the families was accused of damaging some property of the other family and the issue was creating a great disturbance. The two fathers argued; the mothers shouted at one another, the many children fought with each other and the situation was getting out of hand. Neither side would give in, and there seemed to be no solution. Finally, the two heads of family agreed that they would take their dispute to the local Hasid, who was a wise and pious rabbi, regarded as the holy man of the area; and they would ask him to render judgment.

Accordingly, the two men requested an audience with the rabbi, and at the appointed time came before him with all their wives and children. The rabbi asked their problem and they answered him, each proclaiming his own righteousness. The rabbi asked the men each to tell his own story at whatever length he required. Each of them spoke in detail while the rabbi listened intently, his eyes closed. Finally, when the men had finished, the rabbi himself began to speak, and all the members of the two families gave him their rapt attention as they listened for his verdict.

He began by telling them how interesting he had found their stories. While he was listening to them, he said, he could not help thinking also of the situation of the Children of Israel when they were in bondage in the land of Egypt. They also had had many arguments there, not only with Pharaoh and their Egyptian taskmasters, but arguments among themselves as well. He was reminded of this particularly, he said, because the time of year was nigh when they would be called upon to remember and celebrate the events in Egypt. He could not help thinking, as they were talking, of the holy days of the Passover season soon to come.

The rabbi then went on to describe to them his thoughts while each had been stating his own case. He had thought of Moses as an infant alone in the rushes of the Nile with his sister Miriam anxiously watching him from the shore. He had thought of the miracle that had made a place for the slave-born baby in the house of Pharaoh's daughter and of the blessing that had followed him when he had left Egypt in exile. He had thought of the burning bush and the word of God calling Moses, the miracles in Egypt, the deliverance, the struggles, the wanderings in the wilderness, the promised land, and the prophecies which they were even now fulfilling in their dispersion among the peoples of the earth.

When the rabbi had finished talking, the two families said, "Amen," which is a way of saying "Yes" with religious feeling. They thanked him for having spoken to them and for having solved their difficulty with such sagacity. All the members of the families then shook hands with one another, blessed each other, wished each other health, long life, and a fortunate year. Then they departed, well content with the wondrous wisdom by which their dispute had been settled.

It was not an illusion. The dispute had indeed been settled. The two families were in conflict no more, and the spirit of argument was gone from their hearts. To this extent the story illustrates a miracle of another kind, the miracle of the transformation of conflict into harmony in the life of human beings. It is a miracle with a principle behind it.

What had happened? The two families were composed of individuals in a small and poor community, their personal needs were primarily to earn their livelihood, care for their children, and to try to secure some status and property for themselves. The pressure of these needs was felt at the outer edges of their personalities, the place where the ego meets the environment and struggles with it to establish its social identity. Here, where egos are insecure, they contend with one another and bring about the conflicts in society where one human being is pitted against another.

The dispute which the two families took to the rabbi was experienced upon this outer environmental level of life. The rabbi met it there. He accepted it and he neither scolded nor blamed them. He did not judge them. He began by permitting the conflict to express itself upon the level where its main intensity was being felt. He accomplished this by encouraging each side to state its case as fully as it wished in order that the emotions of conflict might be expressed and thereby might be released.

As the heads of the families presented their statements, each maintained his own righteousness against the other and affirmed his own ego.

Tom Dunham

There was a satisfaction in this, a strengthening as well as a quieting of spirit. When the main blasts of egoistic energy had been expended, the dangerous intensity of the conflict was neutralized; it could no longer explode. The possibility of a change in the situation was established. To describe it in other terms, its venom having been drawn, it could then be tamed.

The rabbi could now proceed to shift the focus of attention of the contending parties. He was preparing to conduct them to a different dimension of awareness, a level on which their conflict would appear in their own eyes as inconsequential. Their dispute would not be judged; it would simply disappear from sight. They would not see their conflict any longer because the focus of their attention would be elsewhere.

In order to induce the quality of attention which was required, the rabbi had to proceed indirectly. He could not tell them in advance what he intended to do to resolve their problem. He had to begin by letting them hold the impression that he was going to give them the kind of answer they came expecting; and gradually he would readjust their inward vision. Only in this way would a full and fundamental resolution of their dispute be possible.

When the rabbi spoke, he began by referring to the situation before him. This personal conflict was not unique, he told them. It had a parallel; indeed, it had many precedents in Biblical history. Thus the frame of reference was switched from the small world of self-righteous egos to the large universe of sacred time in which God and man hold their continuing dialogue. This change in the focus of attention involved a shift from one level of the psyche to another. Whereas the situation had been experienced upon the outer environmental level of individual personality where the realities of life are perceived in terms of ego-desires and self-assertion, the level of experience was now placed at the transpersonal depth of psyche.

This involved much more than a different way of thinking about the problem. It meant that the experience of the situation was drawn to a deeper level, and that the terms in which it was seen would be changed. The facts of the outer situation would remain the same, but the perception of them would be different. They would not be thought about analytically. They would not be reconsidered, discussed, and judged. The rabbi had no intention of giving them more intellectual insight into their conflict. He wished to change the situation by enabling them to see it

Tom Dunham

from another perspective. To do this, he had to draw them momentarily out, at least long enough to readjust their psychic vision so that they could look at it anew from the vantage point of the symbolic dimension. If he could make it possible for them to reenter the situation in symbolic terms, their experience of it would be intuitive rather than analytical; and with this new quality of perception, the problem would resolve itself. . . .

In drawing the experience down into the depth level of the Psyche, the rabbi was intuitively practicing a basic psychological principle, the deepening of the atmosphere in which the events of human life can be perceived. He was, in fact, making it possible for the psyche to follow its natural tendency, from which it had been blocked by the ego desires and contentiousness of the two families. The inherent mode of the psyche in resolving life problems is to move inward and downward to greater levels of depth within self. There, in the depths of the psychic space within the individual, ever more fundamental patterns of symbolism are activated, and these absorb as they encompass the environmental problems. The problems of life can then be approached anew in a fresh and open perspective of meaning that has its source at the deep foundations of human personality. More than meaning, the individual derives a new power for living from the energy that is made available by awakening the elemental symbols.

Tom Dunham

Listening for Prayer

ALICE G. TORRES

A distinction is often made between vocal prayer, or prayer with words, and contemplative prayer, the silent prayer of the heart. Here an ebullient young author describes her delight-filled discovery of vocal prayer and the joy she now finds in conversing with God.

Prayer used to be a frustration for me. If I was hurting, I'd fall on my knees and pray, crying out to God, asking that either God would answer what I asked for or would change the circumstances—please. I would continue to send up many petitions. In time, circumstances worked out with various obvious answers: I would never get what I asked for.

It was all very frustrating. I hated going to prayer, realizing what would be would be anyway. Why bother to take valuable time praying. I had too much to do—

However, one day I was listening to a radio program and the speaker said, "When you pray, listen to God; then, take a pencil and pad and write down what God tells you."

"Hum," I thought. "That's interesting."

It wasn't until some months later, when I heard the same speaker advise the same thing again, that I decided to try it. At that time, I felt called to lead a Bible study and needed guidance. In addition, the idea about *listening* to God intrigued me.

I collected a pen and notebook and knelt down to pray. I emptied my head and asked to be filled with God's Spirit, thoughts, voice.

So I listened, clearing my own thoughts, wishes and desires. I was thrilled and anticipatory. It was like going a step further, into the beyond, with God. Better than science fiction; better than a good movie; better than a wild party. Going a step into the beyond with God. Hearing not my *own* petitions, but God's! Good gracious!

I waited and listened. Nothing but peace came into me.

Then I thought, well, I'll just present God with a question. Nothing earth-shattering. Just keep it simple: "God, do you want me to lead this Bible study?"

Alice Torres is a San Francisco writer who recently gave up law school in favor of a master's degree in creative writing. She has published articles in numerous religious magazines and is currently working on a novel.

At first I resisted the answer. I felt myself clam up. You see, I wanted the rush of excitement that comes with leading a study but not the work involved. I resisted God's answer. I had to lecture myself: "Do you want the truth or don't you? You can't have your cake and eat it too. Now let God speak to you. Don't be afraid to hear the truth!"

It was frightening.

I prayed that God would make me willing to hear what he wanted to communicate to me—if anything at all. I prayed. I asked the question again.

"God, do you want me, of *all* people, to lead this Bible study?"

I felt a shadow of peace well up inside me, filling me whole. The peace welled up in my chest, then into my intellect, and I could easily envision myself leading the study. There were no roadblocks.

"Hum," I thought, still skeptical—a very cautious person by nature. "Hum. . . ." I tested it:

"God, do you want me to buy a new car?"

Upon asking this, even as I mentally formed the words, something like a wall barricaded my thoughts; it would not allow me to ponder further. Mentally, I drew a great, dark blank. Nothing. I was irritated and dropped the matter. It was uncomfortable.

I went back to my previous question. "God, do you want me to lead the study?" God's grace and peace returned to my head. I could think; I could envision.

Now, what I am telling you could become very dangerous. What's to prevent a bunch of zealots from running about saying, "God told me to break into a house to steal a TV so that I could watch a religious program; I felt a peace about it." Some people confuse wishful thinking with God's will. It's very difficult to refute what others say God is telling them. But this message is not for *others*, it's for you. Each of us is responsible for our own relationship with God. Let God deal with the *others*.

In addition, some people say that God speaks to them through the Word of God or through other people. I respect that and emphasize that no one should feel inadequate if unable to establish the kind of communication that I describe in these pages. Let us not put God in a box. I'm simply describing to you my own experience regarding my walk with God, hoping it might shed light for you as well.

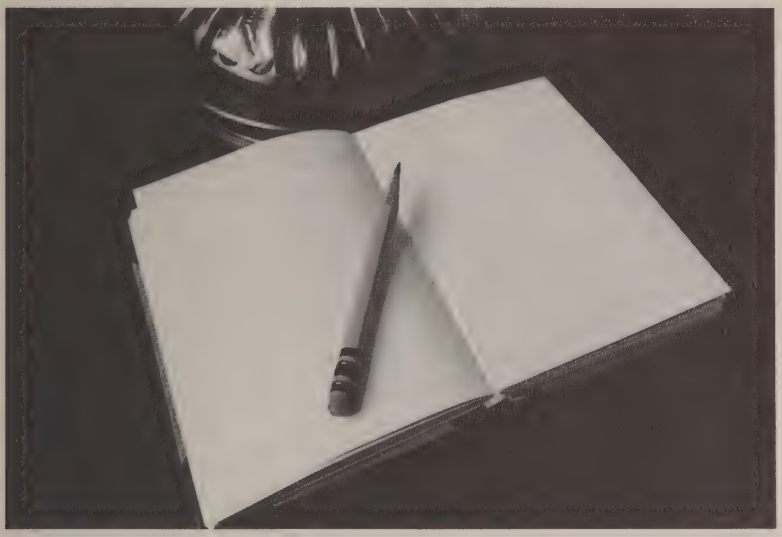
Back to my Bible study: I obviously received my answer to teach and, further, found my two-way communication with God the most exciting thing since Cecil B. DeMille's Ten Commandments.

I began asking God all sorts of questions—legitimate ones. And I received immediate answers for many of them.

Soon I started taking my listening habits on the road with me: After many months of leading the Bible study I felt I could afford another commentary, so I drove myself to a book store. I scanned numerous books and found that the most informative commentary was very expensive. Still, I was willing to pay. I took the book off the shelf again and held it in my hands. I was about to whirl around and head for the cashier's when I said to myself, I'll bet God is going to be pleased. I love to hear God say *yes*, so I'm going to question God right here and now and ask God if I should buy this new commentary on Isaiah. No one was around so I cast my gaze to the floor and prayed, "God, do you want me to buy this commentary?" A wall of blackness came over my mind. —What! This can't be right. I'm reading God wrong! I've lost my touch with God. Our communication is out of whack! I dug deep within myself, excluding all thoughts and asked, "God, do you want me to return this book to the shelf?" An ease came over me, the black wall lifted, and I knew God had answered.

I turned and left the book store empty-handed.

The more I delve into the Word daily for reading or preparation for the



Tom Dunham

study, my communication with God grows and grows, and now I talk to God about many things in many places. It's wonderful: "God, do you want me to take on a permanent job or remain a temporary?" "God, for what shall I pray for my friend Gloria at the office?" Self-imposing as it may sound, I now invite God into the tiniest parts of my life, every part.

Oh, yes, many times I get answers I don't want, but I know they are for my own good. And sometimes I purposely don't go to God for direction because I'm afraid of the answer. Then, much later, after stumbling and falling on my face, I pick myself up, dust myself off, and go back to God in prayer, and I *listen*.

I love to pray, and now, I no longer suffer frustration when praying. My prayer life is so exciting, sometimes I can hardly wait to get home so that I can kneel down, lay my head in my arms, and let the Holy Spirit lead me.

"God, shall I write an article on listening for prayer?"

With God leading me, I see constant results. It's better than a great movie!

Cecil B. DeMille, eat your heart out.

Love Always Wins

CHARLOTTE CARPENTER

We welcome your account of your own "Transforming Experience" (an experience related to prayer or meditation that had an outcome for the good of an individual, group, or institution). Please send it typed and double spaced to The Editor, Fellowship In Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542, and include a brief biography.

Several years ago on Memorial Day, our children who had spent the weekend here, had to leave early in the morning.

As usual, after they left, I had that lonesome feeling after enjoying pleasant visiting, game playing, sharing happenings in our lives and eating together. The house was too quiet as I went about the chores of picking up, burning trash, doing laundry but I am thankful for each visit.

I thought of each of our children and grandchildren and how dear they are to us. I used to entertain an impossible dream of all our family living within several miles of each other. This was not to be nor should it be, since their different locations have enriched our lives and broadened our view of this wonderful country of ours.

In the afternoon I went alone to the cemetery where my mother, grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins are buried. I wept, not just for them, but for a father, 2 sisters, 3 brothers-in-law, a niece killed at 24 in an accident, a nephew who committed suicide under the influence of drugs, buried in other cemeteries and other states. I guess cemeteries are for us to remember and grieve for those we love who have left the world.

I returned home still blue for no particular reason and then I saw it. Written neatly down in one corner of my kitchen note board, barely visible among the flowers, were these words, "Dear Grandpa and Grandma, I love you," signed Kim.

Our little 5-year-old granddaughter had written it before leaving, unknown to me, but now I had found it when I needed it most.

It lifted me and everything looked brighter and better. It reminded me that love is all that matters. I thanked God for a close family. Though miles apart, we share that love that makes life worth living and stems from our mutual love for God.

Charlotte Carpenter, a nationally recognized poet and writer from Kansas, is a regular contributor to "F.I.P."

Tom Dunham

THE QUEST FOR CHARACTER
by Charles R. Swindoll, Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon, 1987, 207 pages, hardback, $12.95.

The author of *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* divides his new book of short, uplifting essays into two parts: "Guard Your Heart" and "Give Your Heart." The first section features topics like success, single-mindedness, and sincerity; the second treats subjects like contentment, dedication, and faith. Swindoll emphasizes the "quest for character" as an alternative to "drifting downstream" and "gathering debris." "Without a quest," he writes, "life is reduced to wimpy black and white, a diet too bland to get anybody out of bed in the morning."

THE CONTEMPLATIVE WAY OF PRAYER: DEEPENING YOUR LIFE WITH GOD
by Robert Faricy, S.J. and Lucy Rooney, S.N.D., 1986, Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, paperback.

To enter into a closer personal relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer is the purpose of this book, write the authors in the preface. Two broad currents within Christianity are blended to achieve a more profound experience: charismatic worship and contemplative prayer. The book teaches how to pray with the Bible and reinterprets the traditional practices of contemplation. Finally though, Faricy and Rooney suggest that perseverance is the greatest virtue in a person of prayer. "With perseverance," they write, "you don't need a book, your book is Jesus. He's in the Gospels; he's in your heart."

THE RESTLESS HEART: THE LIFE AND INFLUENCE OF ST. AUGUSTINE
by Michael Marshall, 1987, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, hardcover, $19.95.

This copiously illustrated biography of the saint who has been "buried beneath the dust and debris of much brilliant scholarship" as the author, Anglican Bishop Michael Marshall, writes, is directed to the non-specialist, to the reader who might enjoy a popular picture of the Church Father. Although the book is unquestionably the work of an "unapologetic enthusiast," Marshall portrays St. Augustine not as an other-worldly saint

but as a colorful human being and one of the most influential men in all of Christian history.

INSIGHTS FOR TODAY: THE WISDOM OF THE PROVERBS
by F. LaGard Smith, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1985, 181 pages.

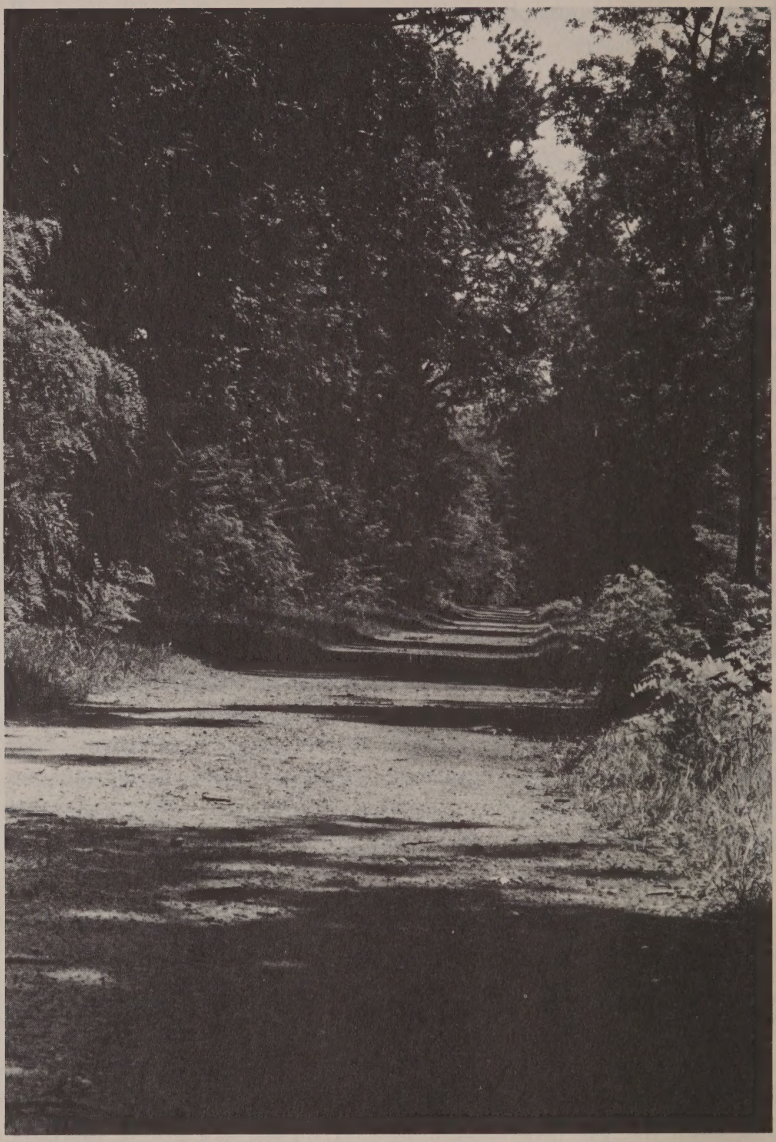
Beautifully bound in dark maroon leather with gold lettering, this book is a joy to handle. Thirty-one sections of reflections alternating with quotes from the Book of Proverbs provide a month of nourishing insight and inspiration for those with a daily practice of *lectio divina*. "Reading Proverbs is no academic exercise," the editor quite rightly writes, "it is a life-changing experience."

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY FOR THE EIGHTIES
by Claire E. Lowery (ed.), 1983, Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, Dubuque, Iowa, paperback.

The book is one of the results of a symposium that endeavored to depict the varied dimensions of an authentic Christian spirituality. The four essays succeed admirably in doing just that: from the point of view of three women and one man, three Catholics and one very liberal Protestant, the personal, interpersonal, social, political and ecumenical aspects of a spirituality of the eighties are illuminated. In her introduction Claire Lowery (who also writes one of the essays) says she hopes that the book "will permit readers to identify the way of Christian spirituality in their own contemporary lives." It does!

PATH THROUGH SCRIPTURE: FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION
by Mark Link, S.J., 1987, Tabor Publishing, Valencia, California, paperback.

Mark Link describes his work best himself: "This book grew out of challenges." The first came from a friend who said, "tell the story of the Bible in a single book. There's no book like this available for the average person." The second challenge came from a teacher who said, "include in that book the best activities, discussion topics, and prayer exercises you've gleaned in twenty years of teaching." The third challenge came from a businessman who said, "write that book in nontechnical language. Use lots of examples and stories." The author has met the challenges remarkably well.



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